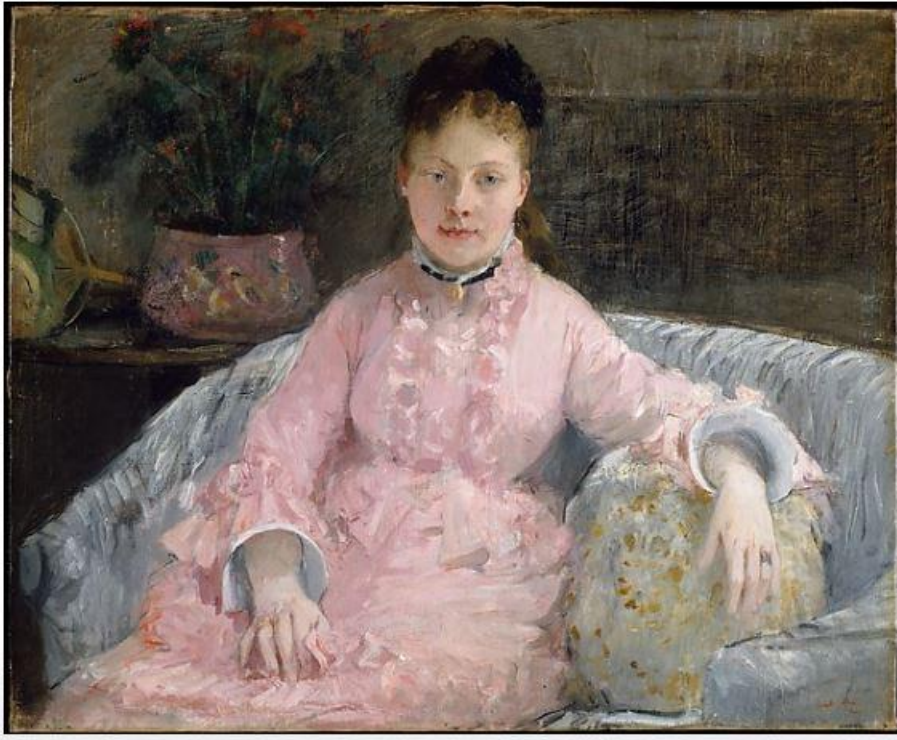


PD WEEKLY

VOL. 1, ISS. 2



"The Pink Dress (Albertie-Marguerite Carré, later Madame Ferdinand-Henri Himmes, 1854–1935)" by Berthe Morisot (French, Bourges 1841–1895 Paris) via The Metropolitan Museum of Art is licensed under CC0 1.0

HELEN MACKAY
CONRAD RICHTER
RAY BRADBURY
GUY DE MAUPASSANT

This week's issue is dominated by the obscure WWI-era writer, Helen Mackay – made all the more obscure by the lack of data available about her, as she shares the same name and approximate age of a prominent medical professional of her day. Perhaps they're the same person, though the writer died in 1961, the medico in 1965; one never knows with the dearth of information on minor writers of any era. More famous is Conrad Richter, who went on to write one of the more popular short novels of the mid-20th Century, 1934's *The Sea of Grass*, which became Tracy & Hepburn's most successful onscreen pairing. *The Head of His House* comes from a 1917 collection of then-promising writers, called *The Grim Thirteen*. Even better known is Bradbury, featured here in his editorial from -and contributed poetry to- his 1940 sci-fi fanzine, *Future Fantasia*. Last but not least, a mystery tale from Guy de Maupassant, a most respectable rogue of a Frenchman. – Matt Pierard, *PD Weekly* editor.

ODETTE IN PINK TAFFETA

from *Chill Hours*, 1920

Odette's mother sat and looked at her.
Nothing ever was lovelier to look at than
Odette. Paul's mother was coming to dine, bring
ing little Claire, and there would be the General
de Joncels, and Antoine de Carnae, and Odette had
put on her new dress.

The world had grown to be so sad a place that
Odette's mother was almost afraid of the pink taf
feta dress. It looked so happy and so young. She
had thought, when she got it for Odette, would
the child ever wear it? Would not just her wear
ing such a gay little dress, tempt mourning down
upon them?

Odette was arranging masses of roses in the blue
old Sevres bowl on the piano against the window.
All the green dusks of the garden and the blues
of the Paris roofs and chimneys were behind her,
under the sunset.

Her mother wished that Paul's mother were
already come, to see with her the loveliness of
Odette, just like that. She wished, with all her
heart, that Paul were there.

His mother and she had been intimate friends
all their lives. Their people always had been
intimate, there had been marriages in several gen
erations between the Montmeyrans and the Wavignies.

In the world of the Grand Monarch an
Odette de Wavignie had waited faithfully years
through in the Picardy chateau for her Paul de
Montmeyran to come home from the king's
— wars.

Now another Paul was away at war, and for him,
and for this little Odette there was dreamed a
beautiful dream. Her mother did not know
whether or not the dream were Odette's too. It
was the boy's, he had cherished it in his heart
through all these nearly three years of war.

He had enlisted at the beginning, when he was just eighteen. Before he went away then he had told his mother that he had loved Odette ever since he could remember, and that he could not imagine any life possible without her.

There had been nothing to be done about it, he and Odette were both such babies. She had been barely sixteen then. And what could be definitely arranged in such dreadful times ? There was nothing to do but wait. The two mothers dreamed their dream together. And Paul had kept his dream with him while he went a charmed way that seemed unbelievable in all the horror. Some indefinable quality about him made all brilliant wonderful things come to him, lucky chance on lucky chance. It was like him to be an aviator; you thought of him always in sunshine, mounting. He came back for each leave to Odette with glories he was half ashamed of.

But what it really meant to the girl, her mother did not know. Close as they were together in their love of one another, there remained always certain uncrossed spaces between them. About certain deep things each left the other unquestioned. Odette's wide clear eyes must have seen in her father and mother's life together much of which she did not speak. As she grew older, more and more able to understand, her mother had dreaded that she might speak, but she never did ; and so, giving her silence back, her mother left untouched the things words might have marred. Only sometimes she wished she were a little nearer to the child. She wished it very much to-night.

"There," said Odette, drawing back from the roses, "like that they are perfect, are they not, Maman?"

Her mother did not answer at once, the fear that was gathering about her made it difficult for her to speak. She was thinking, it was a dark shadow, "the shadow cast before " Odette had asked her about the roses. She answered, "Yes, dearest, like that they are perfect."

Then the door was flung open, and in came Pafa with a rush. ' ' Maman, I 'm so sorry—oh, they aren't come yet! Good, I thought I was late. It took me ages to get clean, but now I'm awfully clean, you see." His round brown head was brushed very smooth, and his round bright rosy face scrubbed very shiny.

"I thought they'd all be here," he said, standing with his hands in his pockets, in the middle of the room. "Why, look at Odette! Isn't she splendid to-night! She ought to be going to a ball! If only we had old Toto here, he'd play us a tango, and I'd dance with her. You remember, Odette, how every night, always, he played for us, here in the salon, if there were nobody, after tea, when I got through my lessons?" Old Toto was his own particular name for the tutor, who had been twenty-five at most when he went away with all the others to the war. "You remember, Odette? I say, hadn't we fun, we three together?"

Then Alice de Montmeyran came, with little Claire.

"How are you all? Such luck, we found a taxi just at the corner of the Rue de Bellechasse. Oh! that is Odette's dress from my little dress maker ? What a darling ! ' '

Paul's mother and Odette's mother kissed one another, like the convent girls they had been together. About them both, Paul's slight little mother and the stately tall mother of Odette, there remained always something untouched of the world. One could see how both of them would

dream good dreams.

Alice de Montmeyran was still beautiful, rather inclined to amuse herself by outshining younger women. She still could take whatever she wanted of life; people told tales of her that very likely were true. But, whatever she had chosen for her self, the things she wanted for the people she loved were beautiful things, and she dreamed for her son as high and clear and pure a dream as though she had never thrown away an illusion.

Denise, Odette's mother, had treasured illusions out of desperate need of them. As a sort of fetish in much unhappiness, she had treasured her own dream of happiness for her daughter, saving, to give to her daughter, the dream that for herself had never come true.

Odette in her rose dress, curtsied to Paul's mother.

His mother took her hands and swung them out, holding her so, pushed back, to look at her.

Claire and Fafa, aged thirteen and fourteen, blond and brown, rivals and enemies in numberless important affairs of their own, greeted one another with extreme politeness.

"Good evening, Fafa."

"Good evening, Claire."

The General came in, always quite the same; a man of the world first, a soldier after, you would have said, seeing him there without knowing what his record was in the war. A perfect type of the old "nobility of the sword," he had the courtliness in his service of the tricolour that had been his forefathers' in their service of the kings. It was easier to picture him riding to battle with plumes and silver spurs, than in this war's ugliness. But he had been in the thick of it, all along, one of those men the world most depended on. In Paris for a few days, back from all that, you would have thought something of it must be evident about him, but he was only a little more glad than ever to

see them, Alice and Denise. It was half a year since he had been in Paris. And how the children had grown! Odette was just the age to be teased delightfully.

Antoine de Carnae came, late because he had been kept at the Ministry. It was odd how the war had changed him, that had not changed the General. He was only Paul's age, but his cross clever ugly face, worn and sharp, had grown almost old in the three years. He had always been very lame, and now he stooped till he seemed hunchbacked. A wit, people called him, he had never had many kind words for anything or anybody, but now he seemed to have no word at all that was not a sneer.

Standing before Odette he appeared shorter than she. She had almost to look down on him while he talked to her.

The old butler came to the door to say that Madame la Comtesse was served.

Fafa sat at the foot of the table, in the place his father rarely troubled to occupy.

The four long windows of the dining-room were open to the garden, where the sunset still lingered. The table, small in the big room that had known so much pleasure, was drawn close to the windows.

Odette's mother talked with the others, but all the time, as she talked, she was waiting for something. She was listening, through the others' voices and her own voice, for a sound, she did not know what sound. She wanted to say to the others, "Hush! I must listen. Something is going to happen."

She did not know whether the minutes went by very slowly, or very fast. The lights changed in the garden. The thrushes sang, and sang, and then stopped singing. The swallows never ceased in their flight, up and down the sunset, and then up and down the twilight.

When the tops of the trees were lost in the dark above the dark garden, there came the sound she had been listening for. It was only the opening and closing of a door outside in the hall, and steps across the hall as far as the table where letters were put ; then the steps going back, and the door opening and closing again.

In the midst of what she was saying, she stopped and asked old Martin to bring in the letters-.

She wondered if Paul's mother were afraid too.

Paul's mother had been laughing at something, but she stopped laughing. The two women looked at one another, and were afraid with the same fear.

There was a military letter. Odette's mother felt her heart stand quite still. The writing was strange to her. The name in the corner was strange, Lieutenant something, some regiment of infantry. Surely it could have nothing to do with Paul. Yet her hand shook so that she could scarcely tear open the envelope. Then a sense of utter relief. "Oh!" she cried, "it is that poor little tutor of Fafa's, who has been killed!"

Her eyes went again, with something now that was almost joy in them, to meet Paul's mother's eyes.

Then she thought—all the same it was sad, poor little old Toto. Aloud she said, "His lieutenant writes to me because, poor boy, he had no people of his own, to tell me that he was killed, reconnoitring, the night of the 21st—that's a week ago—by a mine explosion, buried, they never could get to him." She was thinking—such a good-looking, clever, really charming boy. She went on aloud, "The lieutenant writes, he was one of those everyday heroes to whom should be the greatest glory." She put down the letter. "It is dreadfully sad," she said, "we were all so fond of him. He was quite like one of ourselves. Fafa adored him."

Only then she realized that it must be a great shock to Fafa. In her own relief she had not thought of that. She looked at him now, at the end of the table.

Fafa was standing up, his chair pushed back. Before she could speak to him he had flung himself about, and was out of the room.

How dreadful of her, she thought, to have read it out so. For herself nothing had mattered but that the fear was not come true for Odette. "Poor Fafa," she said, rising, "I must go to him. He'll feel it dreadfully. He was devoted to that boy. You will all forgive me, won't you? Odette will take care of you. I leave everybody to you, Odette."

Fafa was in the room where he had used to do lessons with his old Toto. He sat by their table, his arms stretched out across it, his brown head down between them, his face hidden.

His mother went to him, and sat down on the arm of his chair, drawing him to her. He nestled against her, silent for a while, and there they talked together of the friend who was dead.

There came a knock at the door, and Claire's voice begging, "Please, Fafa, may I come in?" She came over to him, and stood by him at the table. "Fafa, I'm so sorry. I will give you my trench-ring he made for me, and the Verdun paperknife, because it was you he liked best. Please, let me stay with you."

"He liked you too, ever so much," said Fafa, "though you are only a girl. He said he did, often. You can stay if you like."

Claire scrambled up on top of the table and sat there, her long black silk legs dangling. "You know those two letters he wrote me? You may have them to keep. You may keep them for ever and ever. And now I will even tell you the secret he taught me about the trick with the two packs of cards."

Then Odette's mother, going back to the others, found they had finished dining and were all again in the salon. Odette was pouring out the coffee.

The sunset was over, and the lamps were lighted.

Odette said, "Will you take coffee, Maman?"

Her mother turned to her sharply from some thing she had been saying to Paul's mother. It was not Odette's voice at all that said, so quietly, "Will you take coffee?" It was not Odette's face that was lifted to hers, so calm in the lamp light.

"Odette dear, aren't you well?"

"Why yes, Maman."

But it was not any more her little rose pink girl. It was a white still cold girl, whom she did not know. Something had happened. What could have happened? She wanted to cry out, "What is it, oh what is it?" But then, suddenly, she knew.

She said, "Yes, coffee and no sugar."

Odette, her little Odette, whom she had thought she understood, whom she had thought she could save always from sorrow, whose life she had thought she could make happy—and all along there had been this.

This was what he had meant to the child, he, the tutor, Fafa's little old Toto, who had been quite one of themselves, who had laughed across the table with Odette every day, who had tramped the woods with her and Fafa and "Miss," made up their four at tennis, worked for Odette in her garden beds, mounted her on her tall hunter, ridden with her and Fafa, played Tangos for them to dance.

This was the thing she had felt coming.

The new strange voice of Odette was saying to her, "Maman, the General always takes green Chartreuse, and they have forgotten it."

It was a proud Odette warning her off the uncrossed spaces. No one must come near.

The clock on the mantel struck ten. In less than

an hour they would be gone, and she would be left alone with Odette.

The General was saying, "I have always felt bitterly about that boy's father, that such a man could live and die, and no thanks be rendered to him. He was never appreciated, except perhaps by one or two of the men who worked with him, and by the poor in the hospitals, and a friend here and there, like me, who happened to know." He was standing by the little table of coffee and liqueurs, moving things about on it, in a vague way, with his fine hands, that were so quiet usually.

"These everyday heroes " he began, and stopped.

Odette never turned her face away from the light.

"Poor boy," said the General.

Carnac came from where he had been standing rather apart from the others. He held himself straighter than usual, and seemed scarcely to limp as he walked. He said, "There is no need to pity him." He had many words as a rule, but now he seemed to be searching for words. "For me," he said, after a minute, "I envy him."

Paul's mother said, "But how sad that he should have no people of his own. There is really no one but little Fafa. It is dreadful for Fafa."

Odette said, "Fafa will forget." She said it like some one grown quite old.

How odd the others did not know. There had been a little rose pink Odette, and she was gone. There was a stranger come. And even Paul's mother did not know.

They all went on talking. Paul's mother kept Odette beside her on the sofa, by the piano and the bowl of roses. She kept drawing the girl into their talk, and Odette talked easily, but her face grew whiter and whiter.

The hands of the clock moved on over the gold

sun and moon and world, quarter-hour, half-hour, three-quarters.

"Dear me," said Alice, "Claire ought to have been in bed ages ago; how demoralized we are all becoming! I think it must be because of Odette's new dress."

They sent for Claire to come down from the school-room. Fafa did not come with her. She had been crying, her little chin was uncertain yet, and her eyes were like wet blue flowers.

Odette kissed her good night, and it was not any more just as one child kisses another. It was with a sort of gratitude, as if she were grateful for the little girl's tears, having none of her own.

Paul's mother kissed Odette, and told her again what a darling she was in the pink taffeta dress. The General and Carnac kissed her hand, as if she had been grown up.

And then they were all gone.

"Odette, Odette!" she wanted to put her arms about the girl, as she had about little Fafa.

Odette did not look at her. She said, "I can't go to bed just yet, Maman."

She went to the piano and began moving back things that were on top of it, the bowl of roses, the photograph of Paul in his aviator's uniform.

"Do you mind, Maman dear, just staying, and our not talking? I'd like you to stay, if you aren't sleepy."

She opened the piano and sat down before it.

The light of the lamp upon it made a radiance around her, and the rose pink taffeta dress.

Her mother moved away out of the lamplight and sat still in a shadowed corner.

Odette began to play.

And her mother sat and listened, with nothing else but that she could do for her. She could not touch her, or speak to her, or even look at her.

She could only listen, while she played, over and

over again, the Tango that the tutor no one had thought of used to play, for her and her small brother's dancing.

THE CAULDRON

IT IS not only winter at the high windows that makes the ward now always dark and cold. Everything is grown numb. One seems not able to care any more.

This morning I could not even be glad about the 10 bis., the boy they called my little monkey, "le ouistiti de madame," who is splendidly well, and went off at noon for his twenty days' leave. He will "go back," and we shall never know what becomes of him, and some one else will be brought in, perhaps like him aged eighteen, to his stretcher bed, in the row down the middle of the long crowded ward.

This morning the bed at the top of the ward, 17, opposite the door from the stairs, was empty, the man with the red hair was gone from it. On the stairs, arriving, I had met the stretcher being carried down, with a sheet thrown over it. It was the canvas stretcher, it sagged down only a little between its poles, the man with the red hair had become so light. How small he seemed to be under the sheet. They all seem to get so small when they are dead.

The linen of bed 17 had been taken away already, the mattress and pillow stared up in their blue and white striped ticking. The blanket was folded, and the black rubber sheet, and they were laid neatly beside the pillow on the mattress.

It gave me a feeling of going away, a ridiculous delightful feeling of being back in a time when there was no war, and things were packed, and one was starting out on a beautiful journey.

But the bed must be got ready, as soon as we had

time for it, for some new 17. And he too, by one way or another, sooner or later, would be gone from it. And there it would be, staring and waiting again.

Always and always and always, coming and going, going and coming, until sometimes it seems that all these men are just one man to whom these things happen eternally, round and round.

Sometimes I see all the things on the dressings table, the bottles and jars and basins and sterilizing boxes, stand out through smoke, against heaps on heaps of bundles of blue clothes, that have boots and heads sunk down. I only know battle fields from the heaps of clothes that lie thrown down on the floor in the hall, in the rush when new wounded are brought in,—of course on battle fields they would have boots, and heads sunk down. The heaps of them are so high that they are come to be the background of all life, for ever and ever.

To-day, doing the things I used to find beautiful, I was saying to myself, almost aloud, "And ever shall be, world without end, and ever shall be, world without end."

To-day again Madame Marthe had one of her headaches. She is a tiny pallid creature, like a white mouse, but when she has headaches her face gets big and red. Her eyes were swollen, because of her headache—had she been any one else I would have thought she had been crying. I did not ask her if her husband were worse, or if anything had happened to little Louis-Charles. It seemed of no use asking.

Once, months ago, when first I learned that her husband had become bedridden—the Patronne told me—I wanted to help, and Madame Marthe said, "I myself can do for him all he needs." She said it with the air of contempt she has when she says, "I prefer to fetch the boiled water myself." "When I used to ask her how he was, she would say,

"Thank you," without telling me, just as she would shrug her shoulders when I asked her how ever she managed the cauldron.

She and her husband and the little Louis-Charles live somewhere among the buildings of the hospital ; until her husband became ill, he too was employed there.

After the world of the sick of the hospital, the five or six hundred wounded soldiers, and the more than two thousand civilians, there is the world of its work-people. Lodged up under lovely old blue roofs, and down in splendid stone-vaulted half storeys, or in the more modern buildings of the exterior courts, about the electric plant, and the steam laundry, and the morgue, and the poultry yard, and the vegetable garden, and the ancient half ruined little shooting pavilion of a king's lady—there is that world of hidden things, like the white things that live at the roots of plants. One sees them at soup times, swarming together about their refectory door. For more than three hundred years the hospital has treated illnesses that often leave marks better not shown outside its red brick and grey stone boundary walls; and many of the people cured there stay on afterwards, to make the living, poor as it was, that they would be denied elsewhere. The husband of Madame Marthe is one of those people.

In the first winter of the war, when I stood far more in awe of Madame Marthe even than I stand now, when a word of hers in praise or blame quite made or unmade me, I met her one day in the central court with a big splendidly built man in an orderly's blouse. He must, before illness took him, have been remarkably handsome, a great rollicking fellow, much younger than Madame Marthe. From a distance he was handsome now, but near by, his face was dreadful. Madame Marthe drew herself up, and said in her proudest

voice, looking straight at me with her proudest look, "This is my husband." It was as if she dared me not to find him beautiful. As if she would make an armour of her pride in him, to protect him from any flinching of mine, or a weapon of it, to threaten me if I flinched. I screwed up my courage afterwards to say to her, "I am glad to have met your husband." But she made no answer, and never again spoke of him.

When he had a stroke it was only after some time that I knew of it. Then it was not Madame Marthe, but the Patronne who told me. She said, "He may live for years. Lucky for Marthe that she is fool enough to think him a treasure." Rubbing her big bare arms and chuckling, the Patronne said, "For me, I think she is better off with him ill; when he was well, and a beauty, it was a dog's own life he led her."

But this morning her eyes were very red and swollen round.

The house doctor came to do certain of the dressings. There is always trouble when he comes to do the dressings. He had been badly wounded and had got his discharge in the first year ; he had done something magnificently brave, but no one remembers now what it was. He had been a hero, but now he is a sickly poor thing, usually cross, who carries complaints to the Patronne.

This morning everything went wrong. The house doctor had reason to scold, and he did scold. Madame Marthe did not seem to care enough to get angry. It seemed nothing could penetrate her sullen indifference. Her air of more than ever despising everything fretted badly the house doctor's nerves. He did not know how desperately it was all confused with the price of milk and eggs for her husband, and coals; and his staying alone all day while she was here at the hospital ; and there being nobody to keep their

wild little Louis-Charles out of mischief; and one of the men's screaming all the time of his dressing, his mouth open perfectly round for the screams to come out of; and my not having flamed enough basins, or unrolled enough cotton; and the house doctor's wanting so many more washings than we had reckoned for.

There had to be more boiled water fetched.

For four years I have been a failure at fetching the boiled water. It has been for four years my great humiliation under Madame Marthe's scorn that I could not manage the cauldron. Nobody outside our service can possibly know what it means to fetch the boiled water. It has been my night mare for four years.

The cauldron, enormous and black on the pantry oven, is as heavy as the round world. It has handles like two huge lope ears. Madame Marthe can take it with one hand, by one horrid ear, and tip it, and have her other hand free for steadying the jug, purchased against her knees, quite easily under it. But I need both hands for it, and my knees are of no use whatever. Madame Marthe says, with that shrug of her shoulders, "Oh la-la, name of a pipe, it is less trouble to do it myself."

This morning she said to the house doctor, "Name of a pipe, I must go myself then—she always makes such a mess of it."

But the house doctor said to her, "Stand where you are, and hold that." And to me, "No nonsense, now, quick, fetch it."

Always the same gestures to go through in the pantry, where there is always the same stale clean smell, that is almost the worst of the hospital smells. Always to drag over the chair, scraping the tiles, close under the oven, and to stand the jug on it, and, on tip-toe, to reach across everything, and take the cauldron by its ears.

The cauldron has no lip. If the water spreads out as one pours, over the oven and the chair and the tiles, the pantry girl scolds till they can hear her in the wards. Her voice is worse than the scraping of the chair on the tiles. Sometimes it seems the most dreadful thing in the world to be shrieked at by the pantry girl. Madame Marthe hears, and comes, and gives that look of hers.

This morning the pantry girl was not there.

There was a pile of tin plates on the chair. I had to move them all over to the table. There* were thousands and thousands of plates, for ever and ever, world without end. I thought I did not care how long it took; what did it matter, out of the days and days, and the years?

But Madame Marthe came; I suppose the house doctor had scolded her because I was so slow. Her head was very high in the air. Could there be an immensely proud white mouse, with its eyes swollen and its head in the air? She did not speak to me, or so much as look at me, she just pushed me out of the way, snatching up the jug, and kicking the chair aside. She fitted the jug between her knees, holding the top of it with one hand, and with her other hand seized one ear of the cauldron.*

If the water had been boiling, I think she would have drowned herself in it, and not minded at all.

But all that happened was that she poured too fast, and the water went over everything, the oven, her blouse, her shoes, the tiles. She had to let go of the jug and give all her strength to the cauldron, or it would have come quite over. The tin jug clattered on the tiles. I thought the Patronne, far off in her office, would hear. Surely the house doctor heard, waiting angrily in the ward.

Quite suddenly I was crying. And then I became aware of an amazing thing.

Madame Marthe was crying. Proud Madame Marthe, who could do anything in the world, and

was scornful of everything, who never yielded, never admitted, never failed, was crying before the cauldron.

I dared not look at her. I turned my face away. "It is so long," I said, and picked up the jug.

She snatched the jug from me. "It is too long," she said. She tried to wipe her eyes against the soaking wet sleeve of her blouse.

And then she had to put the jug down again, that she might rummage among all those odd things in her apron pocket, dressing scissors and string and safety pins, and mysterious papers all wet through, and two slices of wet bread, with some thing between them, that had been intended for her lunch, but never a handkerchief. "Give me yours," she said, "can't you?"

There was all of it waiting for us to go back to, to go on and on and on with, bottles and bandages, pails of things to be emptied, things to be washed, soup at 11, the bed of 17 to be made up, the house doctor with his rubber gloves, and behind all of it those heaps of blue clothes, piled higher and higher.

We stood for a minute looking away from one another, both of us crying.

Then Madame Marthe gave me my handkerchief back, and took up the jug once more, but with no shrug of her shoulders. "Name of God, it is too long," she said, beginning again at the cauldron.

SHE WHO WOULD NOT EAT SOUP

The windows under the arcades of the second courtyard open to dormitories that are lined with rows of very small black iron cots, each one numbered and placarded, and to a refectory where there are rows of very long, very low, bare board

tables and benches. In fine weather, at noon and at three o'clock, the children—always more than a hundred of them, foundlings and abandoned children and children of criminal parents—are out in the courtyard, in their clumsy blue-checked blouses, boys and girls alike, all the blouses too long or too short, too baggy or too pinched.

They are sickly, often defective children, sent in from various other institutions and asylums of the Assistance Publique to be cared for temporarily in the hospital—unpleasant children, the nurses of their service complain bitterly of them. They are so rough and noisy, out at their recess in the courtyard, that it seems they must be happy, all of them alike, in their ugly blouses.

But one cold afternoon in the armistice winter, as I came down our stairs after dark, I heard a woman's voice in the courtyard shouting, "Stop out there, then, little beggar, and freeze to death if you like," and a door slam to.

There was a small child crouched on the cobbles, in the light of the lamp at the refectory door. It was a girl of ten or twelve; she went on sobbing when I picked her up.

I knocked on the door, and the nurse put out her head, her face red and angry in the lamp light.

"There now," she said to the child, keeping the door shut all but a little against the cold, "there now, the lady sees what sort of a girl you are."

She was a thin little white thing, with a sharp face, and her head set too far back, so that her little shapeless body curved forward, out like the breast of a pigeon. She was shivering with cold while she sobbed.

"You see what it is," said the nurse to me, "miss is too grand for us! Miss will not eat her soup, not she! It is not good enough, our soup, for her! What does she want, the grand young

miss? "What can we serve her with? I should like to know! She not to eat our soup indeed! I tell her she may stop outside in the cold till she begs for it, till she knows how, if it were not for us, she would be out in the gutter to freeze and starve."

The child had put her arms up over her face, and was sobbing into them. Her elbows stuck out awkwardly in their blue checked cotton sleeves, that were too long.

"But soup is good," I said to her, "and dear, don't you know, all good little girls like soup?" Suddenly the child flung her arms about my knees and clung to me. "Oh, I am good!" she sobbed ; "I am good, I do like soup. It is not that ; it is that in this place I am not hungry. I do not know them here, and I knew those others. And there I had a yellow bowl for my soup, and my blouse was striped. And the girl who did the floors, she kissed me once. And there was a green stain, very funny, on the wall beside my bed. So I can't eat here; I can't! Oh, please, I want to go back."

The nurse, through her scant opening of the door said, "She is just come in new to-day, and nothing suits her. You would think instead of from an asylum she had come from a palace." She opened the door wider, and her face, the anger passing, was not unkind.

Inside I could see the other children sitting along the refectory tables, bending rows of little heads over rows of brown bowls of soup. "Look at them," I said to the little girl, "what a happy time they're having !" But she only sobbed when I tried to pet and comfort her.

"You'd best leave her to me," said the nurse, "I've a bit of chocolate I'll give her. Come and see her to-morrow, she'll be all right then." She reached out and took the child—a bundle of striped or checked cotton, for anyone to pick up and put

anywhere—away from me, with her big red hands. "She's strange now," she said, "and home-sick, but she'll get used to it soon here, just as she got used to it wherever it was they had her before. There'll be the same fuss again when they send her on from here. It's no use taking notice, they are all like that, all of them, the sort that gets home sick."



POTATOES AND WAR

by Helen Mackay, **Accidentals**, 1917

All morning in the fire zone of Paris the young lieutenant had watched the old woman who was digging potatoes.

It was a day of the season of market gardens in the year of desolation. Paris was breached with cannon and burned with petrol. One was growing used to the lightning and thunder of war. The storms of two sieges had kept Death so close to Paris and for so long, that it had come to be part of life, accepted as of every day and common place.

There, where the young lieutenant was on picket duty and the old woman was digging potatoes, shells had, for months, been coming and coming again, to blaze black trails through the silver steins of the poplars or to smoke up the good earth of the fields.

In the fields someone was burning brushwood, and the smell of its smoke mingled with the smell of the gunpowder smoke. The two smokes together hung in the mist that lay along the river. It was a

misty blue day, and the smoke of cannon made beautiful little sudden white clouds in the soft veiled sunshine.

The young lieutenant walked up and down past the rows of the old woman's potatoes, and would have given anything in the world, except the one thing it would have cost him, to be able to get away to where the smell of fields was not all mingled with the smell of war.

Once a shell burst so close to the old woman and to him that the broken black hot bits of it were all about them.

Then he said to her almost angrily, "My God, granny, why don't you get away out of this?"

She was a little thin doubled-up old woman with a face like a nutcracker ; one imagined her nose and chin snapping together. She lifted her head and looked at him out of sunken vague old eyes.

"Why don't you get away?" he asked her again.

"Why don't you?" she asked him.

"I?" he said. "I? I cannot. I must stay."

He was so young that he added proudly, "I must do my duty."

She said, "Eh? B'en, what will you? I also must do mine." She went back to her digging of potatoes.

NOVEMBER SECOND

ALL the flowers of Paris that day, with the florists and in the markets, in the stalls at the street corners and in the push-carts, everywhere, were white and purple flowers, sad in the sad grey day, white chrysanthemums and white and purple asters and violets and white roses that lived to die on graves. The streets about the cemeteries were lined with imitation flowers of tin and zinc, wreaths and anchors and crosses, that when one was young one had not liked to think of as being given to those

who in death were gone so far from tawdriness. When one was grown older and had come to be better able to understand sorrow, there was some thing that touched one in the very tawdriness and ignorance of those little offerings to the dead, some thing of attempt and failure. The offering of such ignorant things to the dead, of whom the humblest are so very strangely great and beautiful, was touching, as are all mistaken little poor efforts of love. The dead, coming there and seeing, must feel about it, "They thought to give us pleasure." The streets were full of people in deep mourning. It was a soft, still day. One fancied the dead came back for a little, in the grey, soft stillness, that one so intensely felt, for all the confusion of people's coming and going. Up and down the white and purple streets the people in black came and went. And one thought of the dead as being very sorry for them, as being touched by the father's shining, stiff black gloves, that were too long in the fingers, and by the grandmother's having trudged all the way, and by the mother's having put so much crepe on her bonnet, and by the band of crepe on the sleeve of the man's white blouse, and by the baby's not noticing any of it.

TWO GRIEFS

IN the florist's shop two women stood looking at one another among the white and purple flowers. All the flowers of Paris that day were white and purple, for it was the day of the dead. It was a still, soft, dark day, heavy with pent-up rain, as that day always is, for the taking of flowers to the cemeteries. The older woman was dressed in deep mourning, her veil over her face. She was tall and slight. The girl, looking up at her, could make out, through

the veil, that there was a wave of grey in her dark hair, drawn back from her forehead, and that the outline of her face was very clear-cut and white. She was a great lady; the painted and tawdry little girl had seen that from the first glance at her as she came into the shop.

The girl did not wear mourning. Her dress was so poor that it made her seem oddly out of place in a grand shop like the florist's. The lady, looking down at her, saw that she was quite beautiful. There was something in her eyes that the painting of them did not take away, and there was something about her mouth that the scarlet did not hurt at all.

There was a heap of white violets on the table by which the two women stood.

The man of the shop had been about to wrap up the violets for the girl, but when the lady came and asked for white violets he hesitated, with the three-cornered folds of wrapping paper in his hands. The lady had said that it was only white violets she wanted—nothing else would do. And those the girl had bought were all he had or could get anywhere that day. And it was the fine lady, of course, he desired to please. He hesitated, and looked from one woman to the other. He said, "Madame, I regret it infinitely, but infinitely.

These are all the white violets I have, Madame, that this moment Mademoiselle has taken. What can I do, Madame? Unless Mademoiselle were The lady said to the girl, "Mademoiselle, there must be other flowers you could take. It is that for me there are only these."

The girl said, "I have searched all Paris to find them. There are none to be had in the markets or the booths or the push-carts, or with the other grand florists, anywhere."

The woman said, "If I cannot find them—if I cannot find them anywhere " It was odd the way she said it. She put up one hand in its black

glove and pushed the veil back from her face, as if not caring at all, in her wish to see the girl's face, that the girl should see what was in hers. Anyone could have seen in her face, that death had had for her both sting and bitterness in it. She said to the girl, "I want them for someone who used to love them best of all flowers." The girl said, "They were the flowers the one I want them for loved best too. ' ' The man of the shop was folding the paper round the violets and fastening down the corners with gilt pins. "I want them for my mother," the girl said; "she used to look at them in the florists' windows. She never had any. She never had anything that was beautiful." "You loved her?" asked the lady. " ' Oh, yes, ' ' said the girl. "And she knew it?" "Oh, yes," said the girl again. "She had that," said the lady—"you gave her that." She stood looking down closely into the little painted face. Anyone could have seen in the girl's face that, for her, death had no sting or bitterness. "I envy you," said the lady, and drew her veil down again to hide her face. The girl came nearer to her with a sudden, swift movement. "Oh, Madame, the one you loved, who is dead, did not know " She stopped herself short, realising what she had said. The lady turned and would have left the shop. But the girl went past her, pushing her aside rudely, and was at the door, and was out of it.

THE LITTLE CHAIRS

The American girl who had married Etienne de Kernac used, in those many bad enough moments when it seemed as if she could not stand it, to look

at his mother and wonder if it was possible that she, in any way, felt things.

How could it be possible for one who felt, who felt at all, to go through what the mother of Etienne had gone through, the very sort of thing that she herself was going through now, and never have rebelled, and never have complained, and in no way show the mark of it.

She knew that her father-in-law had been an even more brilliant man than his son, and harder, more autocratic, tyrannical; even more neglectful of his wife, her mother-in-law, than Etienne was of her ; even more cruel in his demands and in his indifference. Her mother-in-law had lived all the years as she, Marian, was asked to live, shut away, unconsidered, in the solitary old chateau, to which the master of those days had come even more rarely than did their present master; she had been good to the poor, and seen to it that the great house was kept up as properly as possible with the scant money allowed for it, and that Miss treated the children like the little great people they were ; had religion for what comfort it might be to her, and had embroidered all those marvellous coverlets for the beds in the state chambers that were never used.

For a few weeks of every year Etienne 's mother had come up to Paris, as Marian came now; had received formally, one evening a week, in the old hotel near the church of Sainte Clothilde, as was expected of Marian ; and had gone out formally, as Marian was supposed to, when others of her very high-placed, small little world as formally received. Marian, being taken about by her in those seasons in town, used to watch her, stately and charming among stately charming people, who had talked of Etienne's father, in his time, just as now they talked of Etienne, and wonder, out of sheer depths of loneliness, how she had stood it, why had she stood it t Or was she just a gracious figure, made

up of little gestures and phrases, little formulae and standards and measurings, content to live by etiquette and detail and tradition, for whom there really had not been anything to stand?

She used to look at her husband's mother when they sat together, morning after morning, in the vast "little salon" at the chateau, each with her embroidery or some gentle dull book, and wonder, while the ceaseless threatening of the sea came in at the windows, could one have felt, and have endured it?

In their close solitude together the answer to that question came to be of morbid, desperate importance to Marian. If only she could know. It seemed to her that she could bear it if only she knew that the woman who had borne it had suffered as she did, had felt things as she felt them.

She was so good, Etienne's mother—how terribly good she was—but was she good through grief and pain, or was she good because she knew nothing of grief and pain, and so, quite easily and correctly, just went on?

To know that would have made all the difference of her life to Marian.

She had ceased hoping anything about Etienne ; that was all quite hopeless. She had thought he loved her, but he had not loved her. She had thought she could love his home and his people, but she could not. It was all so utterly his. She had thought her children would mean everything to her, and that they did not was very terrible to her. Perhaps that was, for her, the most terrible part of it. When they were babies and quite her own, how she had loved them! She had thought all her life was in them, and happiness. But as they grew bigger they came to have so little need of her. They did not seem to care at all for any thing she could give them. They were so unlike her, she could not understand. She watched them from day to day growing more and more unlike

her. Sometimes they seemed to be quite stranger children. Sometimes they seemed even to be little enemies, they so perfectly belonged to the life that she almost could not bear. Sometimes she was afraid of them ; they, like all the rest of it, were so utterly Etienne 's. She wanted terribly to give them happiness, but they did not seem to want it from her; so they gave none to her, and she had ceased hoping for it from them.

And yet she had not ceased to want happiness. She was so young, and she had so long to live. There must be happiness somewhere, and why should she not go to it ? Why should she stay on where it was not ? Why should she stay on in the life that gave no happiness to her, and made no use of her ? The world was so wide.

And then she would turn to Etienne's mother. Had Etienne's mother ever felt how wide the world was? And how full it was of chances for happiness? Had she known what she lost? And had she stayed on because of some right that there was in it? If she had felt the burden of it, if it had been to her such a burden as it was to Marian, must she not then have had some reason for bearing it, and might not that reason be Marian 's reason for bearing it too ? Might not her just having borne it, be proof of a reason and a right?

That was what, it seemed to Marian, she must know. More and more, as the endless time passed to no end whatever, everything, as it seemed, came to hinge on it.

She used to look at her mother-in-law as they drove together through the Paris streets,—behind the plump old horses that must always be exercised, taken out and yet must never be given too much work,—to leave cards at stately doorways, watch her write charming little, quite untrue messages on the cards, and mark off the name on her list as having been got through, and wonder, till it came to be an obsession, had she ever felt

things other than that? Or was that all that life meant to her ? Was that the size of it, by her measurings, for her, between two eternities? And was that what it ought to be, always, for every one?

She used to look at her mother-in-law as they walked together in the paths of the chateau garden, where some few flowers struggled for life against rock and sand and sea wind, and torment herself with wondering.

And she used to look at her wonderingly and most of all when they were together in the room of the little chairs.

That was her mother-in-law's special sittingroom, which opened from her bedroom, in the wide north gallery of the chateau. Marian went there rarely, and only by special invitation, if perhaps her mother-in-law had a chill or a migraine, or for any reason was obliged to keep to her apartment. The little brocade-covered chairs, seven of them, stood around in a circle in the centre of the big, quiet, deep-coloured old room. They were beautiful little chairs. They had been the baby chairs of Etienne and his brothers and sisters. Etienne's was the gold and dark green one. The pale blue and silver one had belonged to the sister, who was married now, and came back but for brief visits in odd years to the chateau. The crimson one and the sapphire blue one had belonged to the two younger brothers of Etienne, who were out in the world, in brilliant ways, very far from the chateau. And the rose and grey one had belonged to the eldest little brother, who died when a child. They all stood together in their empty, formal, quiet circle. And Marian, whose correct, unresponsive, indifferent boy and girl were being well brought up as befitted their importance, used to look across the little empty chairs at the mother of her husband, and wonder.

The courteous, remote, great lady, why did she

keep them there, the little chairs? Did she feel—feel—anything when she looked at them? Was it a comfort to her to look at them, and remember baby figures sitting in them? Was it an unceasing pain to see them empty? Was there special meaning for her in the rose and grey chair of the child that had never grown up, that had never outgrown her, that was gone from her, not in life, but in death, whose ways are kinder, more sparing of illusion? Or did she keep them there just because it is rather a custom to leave in their old places the little chairs of the children, who, in life or death, have gone away?

It seemed to Marian that, if only she could know what the little chairs meant to the woman at whom she looked across them, she would know something because of which she never need be so desolately alone again.

If only she could know that Etienne's mother, in her stately, formal life, had loved the children to whom the little chairs had belonged, loved them not just correctly, conventionally, but with rapture and with pain; had suffered because the boys were so very like their father, who made her suffer; had longed that the little girls should grow up gentle, and should love her; had broken her heart with caring for them in all those ways that may mean so much happiness,—if only she, Marian, could know that, just that, then, in the life she was going through, as Etienne's mother had gone through it, it seemed to her, she might come to know the thing because of which it was, all of it, worth while.

Across the little chairs she would look at her mother-in-law, invariably charming and gentle and courteous and sweet, and would wonder, and could come to no conclusion.

If it was winter, the fire would be lighted in the room of the little chairs, and the wind would howl in the chimney, and the anger of the sea would be roared in, through the rattling cracks of

the windows, from where the waves beat their fury out on the rocks under the castle walls, It was then, of all times, that Marian most felt that she must know.

And always by the little chairs she felt that there must be some conclusion, and that there, by them, she was nearest coming to it.

And always when the sadness of winter added to the room's sadness, it seemed to her that she must get, somehow, to it. The sound of the wind and the sea was all an undertone for her deep need of getting to it.

There was one morning when she came unexpected to the room of the little chairs. She had never, in all the five years, gone there without being asked to, but now she did not even send word that she was coming.

It was a very dark morning of January, and the wind and the sea menaced even more savagely than usual, and the smell of the sea was in all the stony old chateau, strong and salt, and wet and cold.

Etienne had been down for some days at the chateau; he had to occupy himself about things there sometimes; and they had been bad days; he had spent in them a long accumulation of temper. Marian, who did not care any more, had looked at his mother and wondered if she cared.

His father had been just like that, the people had dreaded him just as they dreaded Etienne. She knew by many tokens how it had been. Did Etienne's mother get a double hurt from his voice and his gestures and his eyes? Or did not she even know ? Was it because she was brave that she gave no sign ? Was it because she was fine of soul that she endured? Or was it because she had no soul, and did not feel, and so could, just tradition ally, insensibly, go on?

At dinner last night, for some small thing, he had turned on Marian with an anger that made the lines in his young face as deep and as ineradicable

as the lines in the face of his father's portrait above him on the wall. Had it meant nothing to his mother, Marian wondered?

It meant very little to her, herself, now, only a vague wonder why, when that was all she got out of it, she should keep on with it.

She went to sleep that night a little more wearied than ever by the uselessness of the going on. And the going on seemed more desolate even than usual when she waked to it that morning.

Etienne would have gone back, she knew, in the night train to Paris. She was glad of that.

The maid came and drew the curtains back from the window and let in the wild dark morning. It was with much difficulty that she could light the fire. The wind put it out again and again in the chimney. At last it burned, but badly, and the smoke hung in the dampness of the room, with the smell of the sea, and the sounds of the sea and the storm. The maid brought in her bath and arranged things, and brought coffee and rolls, and put the tray on the table by the bed and went away.

Marian sat up in the big, dark bed and looked about the room.

The room seemed as if it had grown strange to her. She wondered what had happened.

Nothing had happened.

But suddenly it seemed to her that she had come to the end. She thought, suddenly, and for no especial reason, that she had come to the end of endurance. It was all curiously vivid like that, as if she had been coming to a place for a long time, and now, there she was, round the turn of the road, upon it.

She saw quite plainly. There was only to go away: what was there to keep her? Not the religion of Etienne's people, nor inheritance of their traditions, nor fear of losing things of their world, nor any dependence on them. Nothing of theirs

hindered her. There would be things to be done, of course, but they were things that did not matter. All that mattered had been over when she looked about the room and saw it become strange to her.

She remembered how unhappy she had been in that room. She thought that she would never be unhappy there any more.

Other women went away out of their lives because of someone, or of something.

For her there was no one, and it was because of all the things; because suddenly it seemed to her that she never again could sleep in the huge dark bed of tapestry and oak carving. She thought she never again could warm herself at fires of seatwisted pine branches and driftwood from his desolate beaches. She never could eat his bread again. She could never again see the little red and gold lacquer breakfast tray, or the green dragon cup, or the old silver coffee pot with the ebony handle.

She dressed quickly.

It was a relief to put on her travelling things.

She would go away, it did not matter where.

She looked back at her room as she left it, and already it seemed a place left behind. She seemed to be not seeing it, really, but only remembering it.

She ran along the corridors of the red brick tiles.

The cold and the dark and the wet were already things she was only remembering.

As she passed the door of the nursery passage, she could catch the sound of the children's voices quarrelling in their alien tongue.

Her little French son and daughter, they would not miss her, they would vaguely wonder, when they were told that she was gone, if that meant that they need not be taken to the casement-room any more to repeat their English lessons after tea.

She ran on down the north gallery, where the sea and wind sounded like voices grown unfamiliar to her.

She knocked at the door of the room of the little chairs in the north gallery, and opened it, not realising at all that she had done so without waiting for an answer.

The winter morning pressed close upon the windows of the room of the little chairs, and the wind and the sea cried through it, and the fire in the porcelain stove seemed to give no warmth to it.

Etienne's mother was sitting, where she always sat in winter, near the stove.

Her beautiful white hair was carefully arranged as always, even at that early hour. She had the white shawl round her shoulders. As she sat, her back was turned to Marian, and she did not hear her at the door.

Marian stood quite still at the doorway and looked, for there was an odd thing to look at. Etienne would have laughed, but his wife did not laugh.

The whole thing was there for her to see in one moment's looking, and to make what she could of through the rest of her life.

So that was how it was. The children who were gone away had been less near, perhaps,—surely they had been less near,—in the real way of things, when really they had been there, brought in by Miss, and left for some formal, studied hour, than they were now, dreamed over, brought close by the dream that perhaps had been a whole life's dream, as life had never brought them.

And the child that was dead was nearer than were the children who had lived and gone away. Of a sudden the sad old room, that wind and sea cried through, seemed beautiful to Marian, and the woman who sat there alone, where she had stayed through all her life's enduring, had a beautiful right to dreams.

It seemed to Marian that there was nothing for her to do but to draw back noiselessly before the woman by the fire knew that she had seen.

Her mother-in-law must never know that she had seen.

It was so secret and sacred and tragic and funny a thing.

It was that all the little chairs had been moved out of their stiff empty circle in the centre of the room, and brought over to the warmth of the stove, and gathered, all close together, around the chair in which sat the mother of the children who were gone away, all of them.

The little chairs were drawn together, in the warmth, cosily, as if there were sitting in them little figures that had dragged them up and put them so, close, to listen to a story.

And closest of all of them to the mother's chair, so close that the foot of the child sitting in it would have certainly been kicking against her fine stiff skirts, so close that the hand, reached down to it, would have held the hand of a child sitting in it, was the rose and grey baby chair of the child that had died.

PAPER ROPES

ONE day, when she was a very little girl, she and her nurse Fanchon were down in the village, where they had gone with the pony-cart to fetch something, and in the market-place she saw a thing that she was to remember always, and that was to come to have always more and more meaning for her.

It was a September day, and noon, and the market-place of the old Provencal town was full of a sunny gauze of heat. The platanes, with their shadow close beneath them, made a very black square frame that held the heat and sunshine.

Two or three men were dozing at the cafe tables, and there were some dogs asleep. The tall Romaine tower of the church swam in the sky's hot blue.

There was not a swallow stirring. Under the arcades of the round pink arches one could see nothing, the shade was so deep, and no sound came from there. It was not a market day, so the old cobbled square was left to possession of anyone who wanted it. And the boys of the village had taken possession of it.

There was a crowd of them, shrieking with laughter, out in the middle of it. They had got the village fool there, lashed down with strips of paper, on his back on the cobbles.

The cretin thought he could not break the paper ropes. He thought he was a prisoner. He did not struggle at all, but lay with the paper ropes wound around and around him, weeping helplessly and hopelessly.

Panchon stopped the pony-cart, and stood up in it and laughed.

She thought it was the most droll of all droll things in the world, to see the cretin helplessly, hopelessly weeping, bound with paper ropes.

Little Alix, from the high-swung pony-cart, looked down among the boys in black blouses and sabots, at the emaciated, ill-shapen body and shaggy white head of the fool, and saw his face, ugly as a gargoyles, distorted with tears.

The boys danced about him, howling with laughter. Their sabots set the dust dancing ; it whitened the fool's rags.

The lazy grey pony switched off the flies with his long, beautiful tail, and stamped his polished hoofs on the cobbles.

Fanchon stood with the reins over her arm and her hands on her hips, and laughed, delighted.

Alix was to remember the thing always, the quiver of heat and sunshine over the cobbles, the smell of the church that came out from its open door, a red earthen water-jar that someone had left on the rim of the old stone fountain. There was to stay with her always the sense of the care

lessness of the men at the cafe tables, of the mirth of the boys in the dust and sunshine, and of Fan chon standing up in the pony-cart.

SECRET

They had been happy from the first of the year until the end of July. Afterwards she knew that that was very long for happiness to have lasted. One winter day in the great house of her husband's people, where she had so long been lonely, it had come to her and to the man who loved her to know they could not help it, there was nothing they could do. So they had taken happiness all the way along, through the days and hours until that last afternoon.

The secret old streets they had come to know so well were full of summer, red sunset and swallows and odours of acacia. The room over the desolate garden was hot and full of the red sunset. There was a floor of worn, uneven, red brick tiles, and the painted walls were stained and faded. It was a desolate old room, like the garden it looked over and the street by which one came to it. It was all secret and hopeless, as are so many streets and gardens and rooms and sacred things of Paris.

They came to it for the last time. She was always to remember. It was in the midst of the late, long, midsummer sunset. The happiness had come to its end.

It was all over. He was going away. His life was taking him away from her. Far away in his life he might be able to forget that room. She must go on living near it, and never seeing it, and always thinking of it.

Poor little room, how tragically much it had held of happiness.

They did not open the blinds. They could not have borne to see for the last time the shabby little

detail of the room.

The swallows cried past the windows. The garden smelled sick in the heat.

It was a quarter of Paris where there used to be many convents, and church bells ring desolately, They were ringing the Angelus of sunset in deadly monotone. The man and the woman listened for the last time together.

It was the end. And at the end they knew how happy they had been, and how long a time it was for happiness to have lasted, and how far more happy than other happinesses, is that which is snatched back, red, from the teeth of pain.



THE HEAD OF HIS HOUSE

By Conrad Richter

from *The Grim Thirteen*, 1917

I have often wondered whether good old Tim, who did what he did, was sanctioned by God as head; Tim had always been head of the house. Kindly, humble, lovable, quaint, dependable as daylight he ruled over his little twenty-foot-front kingdom with a rule that I, a neighbour boy, or any one else, never felt was there until we committed some crime against it, broke one of his rose bushes or tormented the alley cat. And then Tim's calling us to account was so frank and gentle that it made every boy of us in the square love him like a father.

His wife was queen of his little kingdom. When she was on the front porch I never saw him come up

the sidewalk without lifting his hat to her with an elaborate sweep and with a twinkle in his eye. As a rule he would pause gravely ten feet away and absurdly ask some respectful question in a solicitous voice perfectly audible to the neighbours for several doors. One time I remember it was, " Beg pardon, but do you think the lady of the house would give me boarding here ? "

It seems I can still hear Mrs. Tim repeating to my mother : " Oh, Mrs. Connor. It's the pleasantest husband in the world I have." Often to-day I still see her and Tim rocking disconsolately on their front porch in the throes of the grippe. As if it were yesterday I can hear the old lady's half-sobbed words : " Oh, Tim, nothing tastes good to me any more." And I can still see old Tim shake his head and hear him sadly say : " No use, Lyddy. The sun doesn't shine any more."

They had never had children of their own. That, I think, was the greatest cross that Tim had to bear. But he carried it bravely. In his and Mrs. Tim's old age they took a nameless baby from their church orphanage and gave it the name of Mast and the first name of Shirk after Mrs. Mast's family. And now as the son grew up I saw the first evidence that some day there was going to be a question of whether Tim would always be the head of his house.

Tim was a well-read man, devouring newspapers, books and magazines, saving drawers full of clippings that he never had time to read again. But Shirk came from different blood. At the age of sixteen he clamoured to stop school. Through one of his companions, he secured a job as call boy for the railroad, and he offered six dollars a week to Tim just when Mrs. Tim after a long, hard illness had died. Tim had doctor bills and nurse bills and undertaking bills and very little money and nothing more than a rented house. But, although it was only another cross, he gave way to the boy and did not force him back to school. "Tim, Tim," I muttered to myself. "You

must watch yourself if you want to stay the head of your house."

For months I saw Tim's pathetic face. Then I brought pressure to bear in the office of the train master where I worked. Before long Shirk was advanced to the office job of night crew caller. After the third year it paid him sixty dollars a month, and before I knew it he was married.

I think Marjy married him rather because she loved old Tim than because she loved Shirk. She was one of the sweet, unassuming girls of town. She and Tim had often been comrades on walks and talks. Shirk could never understand her or any other's interest in his father. He didn't seem to see an ounce of worth in the old man. And the older he grew, the less he seemed to appreciate Tim. It used to make me blue to think what an amazing father Tim would have made to some other boy. And the worst of it was that every day now Tim was getting nearer the time when, the chances were, Shirk would try to put him out of his own house.

It was as common a matter as insurance that brought the first clash. At our sitting-room window I had been picking apart the Sunday paper. Through the screen across our narrow alleyway I heard old Tim's voice in proud admonition.

" Now, son of mine ! You've come to the time when you must do your figuring on double harness. Go slow for a while on cigarettes and movies and pool, and buy your wife a wedding present. It isn't fair to Marjy if you don't take care of her, when you know that the railroad relief only pays funeral expenses."

" I don't see much in life insurance except for a big corporation to make money out of a man," observed Shirk. " You don't have any for us to get anything out of when you die."

"Shirk!" I heard Marjy's voice reproaching him.

" That's to my sorrow, son," came Tim's steady tones. " God knows I would buy it to-day, but though such things are cheap for the age of you, nobody sells

it to an old man."

There was a little silence. Then Tim's voice came firmly.

" To-morrow, son, you will be going down town to take out two thousand dollars life insurance. I've read that it would cost you about twenty dollars a thousand. I'll pay one twenty dollars a year, and you will likely want to pay the other."

" I told you I didn't believe in insurance," declared the boy shortly. " Much less in throwing my good money away."

" If you think that, all right," answered old Tim.

" Life's too short to try to change certain metals into gold. But to-morrow you're to go down town and get two thousand dollars life insurance. And as long as you put your feet under my table, my son, you're to remember that I am the head of this house."

" You may be now," Shirk answered sullenly. " But we'll see about that when I'm twenty-one."

" Twenty-one or thirty-one, son," old Tim replied, " if I am alive, I shall be your father, and the head of this house."

The months went on and it drew close to the time when Shirk would be twenty-one. Then one day I noticed that Marjy had become nervous and sallow. When I questioned my mother, she explained it with one five-lettered word. And the next day I heard that Marjy's young husband was gambling with his job. He had begun to sleep on his desk after midnight instead of staying awake and paying attention to business. Just the night before, Logan the night train dispatcher had a hurry call for two crews—one for the yard, and one for Belt Line Junction. It was about three o'clock A.M. He rang long for his crew caller without getting an answer. So he crossed the yards and found Shirk " cocked up " on his desk asleep. The men said it was only Logan's good heart that had agreed to report it next time instead of at once. I felt my friendship for Tim command me. Much as I disliked to do it, I leaned over the fence between

our back yards one evening and told Tim the story. " They tell me since, Tim," I added grimly, " that Shirk has started to ' cock up ' again, only now he turns the other way so his head is nearer his telephone bell. It's a bit safer, perhaps, Tim. But it's ' cocking-up ' just the same. If Logan ever catches him again, it will be all over. He'll be queered with the company anywhere. And you know what other chance a boy or man has in this town, especially if it becomes known that the railroad company discharged him."

" I am grateful to you, Wally," said Tim quietly. " I won't mention your name. But after to-night the boy won't sleep on the job again." He drew himself up resolutely, and though he said nothing aloud, I knew he had said to himself, " I am the head of my house."

But Tim was getting old, and the inevitable happened. One night Logan failed again to get a reply from his crew caller's office. He crossed the yard, and found Shirk once more asleep on his desk. He had to shake the boy to get him awake. Next morning Logan reported the case to the superintendent, and Shirk was at once called and discharged.

I disliked to go home that evening, and once in the house I locked myself in. But it was of little use. About eight o'clock came a knock to the back door and there was Tim quietly asking to see me. I brought him in and tried to explain what had happened.

" You see, Tim, it isn't that the boy went to sleep. Everybody gets sleepy and everybody knows it's hard to keep awake and nobody knows it better than Logan himself. But the boy didn't fall asleep in his chair. He ' cocked up ' on his desk again—cleaned off all the stuff, wrapped up an old coat for a pillow and laid himself down as though he didn't have another tap to do all night. It wasn't sleeping at the post, it was premeditated sleeping."

"I understand," said Tim gently. "It isn't that that I came over for. I was wondering would they

give the boy one more chance! You remember that Paul had to be struck by lightning before he could become Paul."

" I—don't know if they will, Tim," I stammered.

" I might try them."

I did what I could for the boy. I saw Logan and then had a talk with my boss, Schaffer, the train master. He took me in to see Manx, the superintendent. I told Manx chiefly about the boy's lovable old father and the critical sickness of the young wife.

" What sense does he have monkeying with his job when he has a good old dad like that and a sick wife in the house ! " Manx demanded savagely.

There was nothing for me to say.

" Well." Manx stared at his desk. " We'll give him another chance. But his job's been filled. About the only thing now until something better turns up will be flagging down at Winter Street. Tell him to be on duty down there at six o'clock to-morrow morning."

I thanked him and left. That evening I reported my little success to Tim.

" Tell Shirk to take the job, and not to be discouraged," I told him. " Manx hinted there would be something better for him later. He may even have something in mind now, and may be offering this other job just to try Shirk out."

Tim thanked me with such gentle dignity that I felt fortunate to have been able to be of help to such a man. But somehow I had my doubts about Tim being able to manage much longer the insubordinate member of his house. I was still awake that evening when Shirk came home, likely from movies or pool. He came in the side way. I heard the alleyway gate slam below my open window. In a little while I heard the murmur of Tim's news. Then the boy's voice answered distinctly.

" Me go back to the company flagging like a cripple at twenty-five a month ! Not on your life."

" This is only a job to try you, son. The superin

tendent told Mr. Connor it was," Tim explained.

" I don't care what that fool said. The company got smart and fired me. They can whistle till I come back—anyhow not to flag at a crossing at twentyfive a month."

" But they wouldn't want you back at all as far as they are caring," said Tim. " It was Mr. Connor who was the kind enough neighbour to ask the superintendent to try you again."

" What do you know ! " raged the boy. " You never worked outside the shop in your life. I tell you it's Logan who wants to see me flagging down at Winter Street so he can come along and point me out as the fellow he had fired."

" You are blind, son," said Tim clearly. " What does Mr. Logan care about you more than to get out of you as much work as the company pays you for? You have never worked hard enough to make your self valuable to anybody. The railroad company can get a hundred others glad enough for every job they have to offer you."

" And I can get a hundred other jobs if I want them ! " declared Shirk. " You'd be the one to make me flag at a crossing when, I could be having a decent job at three times the money."

" You've always had a chance, son," rebuked Tim slowly. " In the morning I'll ask Mr. Connor to report you off sick for two days ; that's how long you have to show that you can get another job, a decent one. If you don't get one by Friday night—Saturday morning you start working wherever the railroad company wants you, if it's keeping cows from off the track."

" Saturday morning you'll have nothing more to do with me," returned the boy defiantly. " I'll be of age, and I'll work where I want to, and when I want to."

" A boy may be thirty-one and still need a head of his house, son," answered Tim quietly.

" If you're the head of the house, why don't you

own it! Why don't you make enough money to feed the people in your house ! "

Old Tim was silent. I could imagine his wounded eyes.

" Why don't you support your house so I don't have to work, if you're the head of it ! " jeered the boy.

" You, making only a dollar eighty-five a day, trying to boss me—you make me sick."

" You have two days to find a better job in," said Tim gravely. " Then you and I will see who is the head of the house."

Before I was up next morning Tim had asked my mother whether I would please report Shirk off sick for two days—that he, Tim, would explain later. I did as he requested, and spent the remainder of the day wondering what means Tim was going to take if Shirk found no job and still refused to flag. I wondered if Tim would try force. I hoped he wouldn't. Shirk was too big. And he was young, while Tim was starting to wobble. I resolved to stay close by and give the old man help if he needed me.

The evening of Shirk's second day I sat in our sitting-room and tried to read. Though the evening was unusually cool I had the window raised. Through the screen I could see Tim alone with a light in his dining-room, patiently smoking his pipe. Marjy was likely upstairs in bed. Old Tim had told mother early the morning before that her doctor had said that the girl's only chance now was the fresh air, mental diversion and physical recreation of some sanatorium in the mountains. Tim had mentioned that he was going to try to borrow some money for the trip as soon as Shirk started to work again.

I was wondering how much money the old man would have to scrape together and where he would get it, when I heard some one coming in through the alley way. The footsteps echoed dully. By the walk I knew it was Shirk, but it wasn't the walk of a man who had just landed a job.

Through my screen I heard the door close behind

him. Then I saw father and son confronting each other from across their dining-room table. After a moment Tim turned and pulled down the blind. I was out of it. I couldn't hope to hear through Tim's closed windows. And now the possible danger of the old man began to worry me.

I made up my mind to go boldly over and call.

But before I was even up from my chair a shot rang through the loose Mast windows and echoed cavernously in the alleyway.

Other neighbours heard it, too, but I was the nearest. I do not know to-day whether I scaled the fence or scuttled around by the alleyway. But I remember bursting in old Tim's back door, and I shall never forget that scene in Tim's dining-room.

The house was anything but wide, and this room like ours, chopped off for the alleyway extension, was about ten feet narrow. A few moments before, it might have been cheerful. A golden oak sideboard stood against the wall with its glasses and dishes as neatly arranged as when Mrs. Tim was alive. Drawn up cosily to the table were two of the half dozen golden oak chairs. The table was covered with a cheerful red cloth. Beside the white of the few dishes and the yellow of Tim's old pipe, the cloth looked bright red. But it seemed hopelessly faded where its corners dragged the floor beside the rich wine colour that stained the face and hair of Shirk. He lay on the carpet quiet except for an almost imperceptible ooze from the ugly dark hole where his hair and temple met.

I don't remember what I first stammered to the old man. I only recall a fervent prayer to myself that I might see Shirk get to his feet and sneer familiarly into my face. But, except for the trickle of blood down his temple, there was nothing about the boy that moved. I tried to imagine what had happened. Somehow I had no idea that old Tim had done it until he straightened up from the floor and laid an old blue revolver on the red cloth. I could not help

shrinking from him, but I pitied from the bottom of me his dazed grey eyes and shaking fingers.

" He said I wasn't the head of the house," old Tim faltered. " I had to show him I was." He drew a breath almost quietly. " I had to show him."

" But, Tim, you didn't do it—not with that ! " He nodded faintly.

" Even in self-defence, Tim ! A thing like that ! Was he killing you? "

" No," said Tim slowly, shaking his head. " I didn't have to do it in self-defence."

" Then for God's sake don't tell anybody," I flung at him. " Don't say a word until I get you a lawyer. Don't open your mouth."

A moment more and the kitchen and sitting-room doorways were crowded with frightened neighbours' faces. Later came the police and to the first question asked him Tim replied : " He said I wasn't the head of the house—and I had to show him."

" Tim ! " I whispered in his ear, shaking his shoulder, " for God's sake keep your mouth shut."

The police took him away and after tearing myself from knotted neighbours, I went down to the railroad and told Logan the story. Logan was tremendously affected and seemed to take some of the blame on himself. He gave me a card to an attorney friend of his named Munson and told me to engage him—that he would pay the bill. The next morning I reported off and was waiting in the lawyer's office before he came in. I found him a ready listener. But when I had finished telling him the case and everything I knew, he shook his head.

" I'm sorry, but your old man's got no case at all unless we change his story. A man has no legal right, you know, to kill his son in order to make him accept this or that or any other job."

" But there's something wrong somewhere," I stammered. " Tim is one of the finest, gentlest souls in the world. He would never hurt a fly without cause."

" What do you mean by cause? There isn't much cause in law except self-defence."

" I believe it was self-defence," I muttered.

" Your defendant doesn't seem to support you," said Munson thoughtfully. " I think we had better go down and get his version."

We readily gained admittance to Tim's cell, and I encouraged Tim to trust his new friend with every thing.

" As I'm to be your counsel," explained Munson earnestly, " I must know everything just as it happened. It doesn't say that I will tell everything I know. But I cannot and dare not make a defence for you until I am assured that the prosecution will have no vital facts that I don't know."

" The only way, Tim," I urged again, " is to tell everything."

Tim nodded and then repeated merely what he had related to me the night before.

" You cannot convince me that you used a revolver on your son without more cause than that," insisted Munson clearly. " It's ridiculous. Tell me every step, please, just as it happened."

" He was only home a few moments," insisted Tim.

" There is nothing more to tell."

" But I want to know every word that was said, every move you both made. Don't you realise, man, that you may hang for this if you do not tell me what I have every right and reason to know in order to try to save you."

Old Tim bent forward helplessly.

" There was nothing else. If I must hang for it, they must hang me. I am sorry, Wally, for the neighbourhood—and for Marjy. How is Marjy?"

" Mother has her over at our place," I told him.

" She is not much better."

" Wally ! " Tim leaned toward me anxiously. " Before long there may be some money come to her from the poor lad. Will you take it, please, and send her up in the mountains to the best place the doctor can

End."

" I'll see that she gets there right away, Tim," I promised him.

Before we left, Munson tried again to force some reasonable explanation from the old man's lips. But Tim could add nothing to his story. We gave up at last and went to Munson's office, where he summed up Tim's best defence. Briefly, it was that the boy Shirk had resisted Tim, his father, as I had heard him do before, and that old Tim because of his advancing years had used the revolver to threaten—and it had gone off against his will, partially turning his mind. In due time the case came to trial. But it was a losing fight with Tim unmanageable as he had been from the first. To his own disaster and to the frenzy of Munson he repeated twice to the jury, " My son said I was not the head of the house—and I had to show him I was. I had to show him ! " The only satisfaction we had was in the fact that the prosecution was able to force no more from Tim than had Munson or I.

They sentenced old Tim for life and as soon afterward as I could I went to see him. He tried to smile to me as I came in, but it was only a wistful, forlorn twist that threatened every moment to turn to tears. I did my best to cheer him and was glad that I had news.

" Mother got a letter from Marjy to-day," I told him. " Marjy says she and the baby are getting better every day and will be down to see you soon. She says it was the mountains and nothing else that helped her."

" Thank God," muttered Tim, closing his eyes. His lips moved silently. To me they seemed to form words that could only make strange meaning.

" Tim," I demanded, an incredible assumption working in my brain, " what have you known all this time that you haven't told us ! "

Tim opened his eyes and wiped them tremblingly with the freckled back of his hand.

" Nothing, Wally," he muttered.

I was sure now that I had struck a trail. I caught hold of his shoulder.

"Tell me, Tim," I urged. "Trust me! I'll say nothing to anybody. Sit down. You're weak, man! You're sick ! "

But he stubbornly kept standing.

" You promise—never to breathe a word—till I'm gone? " he questioned closely.

" I promise, Tim." I held up my right hand. For a moment he seemed to falter.

" Oh, Wally," he sobbed, breaking down and blinking the tears from his old grey eyes. " Did you never guess when you stood by me so hard? The poor, headstrong laddy. He couldn't help it. He came from other stock than we."

" Couldn't help what, Tim! " I floundered.

" For two days he tried for his job, but everybody refused him," pleaded Tim. " He came home that night so blue. The poor soul, Wally. If he hadn't been blue, he wouldn't have done it—before I could get to him. My revolver was in the sideboard drawer, under the red napkins. He knew it, and till I got to him it was too late."

" Tim ! " I demanded of him, amazed. " Why have you been lying to us, to everybody, as you have? " Tim's eyes entreated me.

" The document ! " he reminded. " It's written there that if the policy-holder takes his life, no money will be paid until it's a year after the insurance was taken out. And for the boy it was only seven months. What would Marjy have done? I hadn't even a dollar to give her to go away. And she had to go."

" But, Tim, Tim ! " I faltered bewilderingly. " Why didn't you say then that Shirk attacked you—that you had to do it in self-defence. You might have saved the insurance and yourself besides."

Old Tim squared his unsteady shoulders and stood gently erect.

" I take care of my children, Wally," he said, " the

dead as well as the living. I am the head of my house."



GORGONO AND SLITH

By Ray Bradbury, from *Future Fantasia* – Spring 1940

"Let us, by all means, be lucid," said Gorgono to Slith. Slith fluttered his reptile tongue and turned his morbid eyes to me. "Yes," he said, "let us, certainly be lucid, Bradbury. From now on use a contents page in Futuria Fantasia." And he spanked his tail slickly on my typewriter.

I don't mind Slith so much, he's only a little anachronistic reptile, a descendent of happier days in dinosaurial dawndom. I never feared Slith. But Gorgono!

Gorgono pierced me with his slanting green, clear eyes, heavy-lidded, extending one claw and attempting to keep it from shaking while his pointed ears stood up straight. A moment before he had been hunting fleas in the fertile hair that clothed his muscular limbs, but now he was serious; so very serious it frightened me.

And when the thunder-voiced, evil-eyed, shaggy haired and monstrous Gorgono reclined on the shelf over my head, saliva drooling with silent precision from his pendulous lips, and gave orders I hastened to obey them. Gorgono was the voice of the critics--the ogre of opinion, the harsh guttural commandment of style and fashion. And now Gorgono had grumbled, "Number your pages from now on, MISTER Bradbury or else YOUR number'll be up. Why, Gad, man, the last issue of Futuria Fantasia I didn't know if I was coming or going, the way you heiroglyphed the sheets. And I might add, you're going to use even margins from here on in."

"Okay, okay, okay," I said, slinking with flushed visage behind my stencils. "But from now on Futuria Fantasia will be ten cents straight an issue. Ten cents straight." "Agreed," snapped Gorgono, "if you are

neater. But you must be new, neotiric, different." Then I flashed them the newly processed cover done by Bok. "Gods!" bellowed Gorgono. "That is stupendous! A fine beginning, mortal, a very fine beginning!" Slith agreed by pounding vigorously on the table with his scaly rump. "And wait until you read Monroe's yarn," I jubilantly exclaimed. "It's not science-fiction, but it's certainly a fine bit of story." "Yes," said Gorgono, "this issue looks much better. Glad to see you've added two new authors, Damon Knight and Joe Kelleam from Astounding. I'll have to remind the fans to send in their dimes for this issue and perhaps support you a little more than they have with letters. But we'll see about that." He got up, stretched, yawned, and vanished in a belching ball of flame. "Yes," said Slith, "we'll see!" And he too vanished with a sharp pop. All was quiet. I went back to my stencils and my opium.

THE PHANTOMS

By Joseph E. Kellerman (ibid)

All day they played among the purple flowers
That lay like frozen flames upon the lawn;
Or dreamed within the shadows of the towers
Whose turret tops were painted as the dawn.
Bright was the garden; peace went everywhere
There was no breath of movement nor any sound
Save butterflies that clove the heavy air,
Or when the bright fruit dropped slowly to the ground.
Then the flowers drooped, from sliver thorns that tore;
Too soon the sun had died in amber smoke,
And frightened now but silent as before
The phantoms watched the garden change its cloak.
Great sable moths flew out, and one by one
The towers melted with the fallen sun.

WOULD YOU?

by J. Harvey Haggard

Would you stroll with me, my loved one
 'Neath the pale Venusian Moon,
Where its misty orb goes drifting,
 Waning, darling, all too soon?
Would you gaze into the rainbow
 Where the lunar moonbeams play,
Could it be you'd softly answer
 "Yes, for all those things I pray?"
If it's so, my darling, kick me,
 For I'd surely be a ninny,
Making love by Venus moonlight--
 When--you see--there isn't any!

NINEVAH

By J. E. Kelleam

They say the bittern and the cormorant
Have nested in the upper lintels there.
The wind builds flowers of dust upon the air,
Lifting and falling, slow and hesitant.
Within the crumbling temples beasts have laired;
Eyeless the windows, broken the terraces;
No laughter breaks the silence. The palaces
Are weathered and the cedar work is bared.

If this be glory's wage, then let me trust
The fragile things that are not built of might,
The lovely things that leave no trace when gone:
The rose that swiftly turns into the dust,
Beauty that blazed a moment----Or a night
Of golden stars forgotten with the dawn.



THE MAN WITH THE PALE EYES

By Guy de Maupassant, from Project Gutenberg's *Masterpieces of Mystery In Four Volumes*, by Various

Monsieur Pierre Agénor de Vargnes, the Examining Magistrate, was the exact opposite of a practical joker. He was dignity, staidness, correctness personified. As a sedate man, he was quite incapable of being guilty, even in his dreams, of anything resembling a practical joke, however remotely. I know nobody to whom he could be compared, unless it be the present president of the French Republic. I think it is useless to carry the analogy any further, and having said thus much, it will be easily understood that a cold shiver passed through me when Monsieur Pierre Agénor de Vargnes did me the honour of sending a lady to await on me.

At about eight o'clock, one morning last winter, as he was leaving the house to go to the _Palais de Justice_, his footman handed him a card, on which was printed:

DOCTOR JAMES FERDINAND,
_Member of the Academy of Medicine,
Port-au-Prince,
Chevalier of the Legion of Honour._

At the bottom of the card there was written in pencil: _From Lady Frogère_.

Monsieur de Vargnes knew the lady very well, who was a very agreeable Creole from Hayti, and whom he had met in many drawing-rooms, and, on the other hand, though the doctor's name did not awaken any recollections in him, his quality and titles alone required that he should grant him an interview, however short it might be. Therefore,

although he was in a hurry to get out, Monsieur de Vargnes told the footman to show in his early visitor, but to tell him beforehand that his master was much pressed for time, as he had to go to the Law Courts.

When the doctor came in, in spite of his usual imperturbability, he could not restrain a movement of surprise, for the doctor presented that strange anomaly of being a negro of the purest, blackest type, with the eyes of a white man, of a man from the North, pale, cold, clear blue eyes, and his surprise increased, when, after a few words of excuse for his untimely visit, he added, with an enigmatical smile:

"My eyes surprise you, do they not? I was sure that they would, and, to tell you the truth, I came here in order that you might look at them well, and never forget them."

His smile, and his words, even more than his smile, seemed to be those of a madman. He spoke very softly, with that childish, lisping voice, which is peculiar to negroes, and his mysterious, almost menacing words, consequently, sounded all the more as if they were uttered at random by a man bereft of his reason. But his looks, the looks of those pale, cold, clear blue eyes, were certainly not those of a madman. They clearly expressed menace, yes, menace, as well as irony, and, above all, implacable ferocity, and their glance was like a flash of lightning, which one could never forget.

"I have seen," Monsieur de Vargnes used to say, when speaking about it, "the looks of many murderers, but in none of them have I ever observed such a depth of crime, and of impudent security in crime."

And this impression was so strong, that Monsieur de Vargnes thought that he was the sport of some hallucination, especially as when he spoke about his eyes, the doctor continued with a smile, and in his most childish accents: "Of course, Monsieur, you cannot understand what I am saying to you, and I must beg your pardon for it. To-morrow you will receive a letter which will explain it all to you, but, first of all, it was necessary that I should let you have a good, a careful look at my eyes, my eyes, which are myself, my only and true self, as you will see."

With these words, and with a polite bow, the doctor went out, leaving Monsieur de Vargnes extremely surprised, and a prey to this doubt, as he said to himself:

"Is he merely a madman? The fierce expression, and the criminal depths of his looks are perhaps caused merely by the extraordinary contrast between his fierce looks and his pale eyes."

And absorbed by these thoughts, Monsieur de Vargnes unfortunately allowed several minutes to elapse, and then he thought to himself suddenly:

"No, I am not the sport of any hallucination, and this is no case of an optical phenomenon. This man is evidently some terrible criminal, and I have altogether failed in my duty in not arresting him myself at once, illegally, even at the risk of my life."

The judge ran downstairs in pursuit of the doctor but it was too late; he had disappeared. In the afternoon, he called on Madame Frogère, to ask her whether she could tell him anything about the matter. She, however, did not know the negro doctor in the least, and was even able to assure him that he was a fictitious personage, for, as she was well acquainted with the upper classes in Hayti, she knew that the Academy of Medicine at Port-au-Prince had no doctor of that name among its members. As Monsieur de Vargnes persisted, and gave descriptions of the doctor, especially mentioning his extraordinary eyes, Madame Frogère began to laugh and said:

"You have certainly had to do with a hoaxer, my dear monsieur. The eyes which you have described are certainly those of a white man, and the individual must have been painted."

On thinking it over, Monsieur de Vargnes remembered that the doctor had nothing of the negro about him, but his black skin, his woolly hair and beard, and his way of speaking, which was easily imitated, but nothing of the negro, not even the characteristic, undulating walk. Perhaps, after all, he was only a practical joker, and during the whole day, Monsieur de Vargnes took refuge in that view, which rather wounded his dignity as a man of consequence, but which appeased his scruples as a magistrate.

The next day, he received the promised letter, which was written, as well as addressed, in letters cut out of the newspapers. It was as follows:

* * * * *

"MONSIEUR: Doctor James Ferdinand does not exist, but the man whose eyes you saw does, and you will certainly recognize his eyes. This man has committed two crimes, for which he does not feel any remorse, but, as he is a psychologist, he is afraid of some day yielding to the irresistible temptation of confessing his crimes. You know better than anyone (and that is your most powerful aid), with what imperious force criminals, especially intellectual ones, feel this temptation. That great poet, Edgar Poe, has written masterpieces on this subject, which express the truth exactly, but he has omitted to mention the last phenomenon, which I will tell you. Yes, I, a criminal, feel a terrible wish for somebody to know of my crimes, and when this requirement is satisfied, my secret has been revealed to a confidant, I shall be tranquil for the future, and be freed from this demon of perversity, which only tempts us once. Well! Now that is accomplished. You shall have my secret; from the day that you recognize me by my eyes, you will try and find out what I am guilty of, and how I was guilty, and you will discover it, being a master of your profession, which, by the by, has procured you the honour of having been chosen by me to bear the weight of this secret, which now is shared by us, and by us two alone. I say, advisedly, _by us two alone_. You could not, as a matter of fact, prove the reality of this secret to anyone, unless I were to confess it, and I defy you to obtain my public confession, as I have confessed it to you, _and without danger to myself_."

* * * * *

Three months later, Monsieur de Vargnes met Monsieur X---- at an evening party, and at first sight, and without the slightest hesitation, he recognized in him those very pale, very cold, and very clear blue eyes, eyes which it was impossible to forget.

The man himself remained perfectly impassive, so that Monsieur de Vargnes was forced to say to himself:

"Probably I am the sport of an hallucination at this moment, or else there are two pairs of eyes that are perfectly similar in the world. And what eyes! Can it be possible?"

The magistrate instituted inquiries into his life, and he discovered this, which removed all his doubts.

Five years previously, Monsieur X---- had been a very poor, but very brilliant medical student, who, although he never took his doctor's degree, had already made himself remarkable by his microbiological researches.

A young and very rich widow had fallen in love with him and married him. She had one child by her first marriage, and in the space of six months, first the child and then the mother died of typhoid fever, and thus Monsieur X---- had inherited a large fortune, in due form, and without any possible dispute. Everybody said that he had attended to the two patients with the utmost devotion. Now, were these two deaths the two crimes mentioned in his letter?

But then, Monsieur X---- must have poisoned his two victims with the microbes of typhoid fever, which he had skilfully cultivated in them, so as to make the disease incurable, even by the most devoted care and attention. Why not?

"Do you believe it?" I asked Monsieur de Vargnes.

"Absolutely," he replied. "And the most terrible thing about it is, that the villain is right when he defies me to force him to confess his crime publicly, for I see no means of obtaining a confession, none whatever. For a moment, I thought of magnetism, but who could magnetize that man with those pale, cold, bright eyes? With such eyes, he would force the magnetizer to denounce himself as the culprit."

And then he said, with a deep sigh:

"Ah! Formerly there was something good about justice!"

And when he saw my inquiring looks, he added in a firm and perfectly convinced voice:

"Formerly, justice had torture at its command."

"Upon my word," I replied, with all an author's unconscious and simple egotism, "it is quite certain that without the torture, this strange tale will have no conclusion, and that is very unfortunate, as far as regards the story I intended to make out of it."



Creative Commons Non-Commercial Copyright, Matt Pierard 2017